

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commander
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Sector Juneau

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October 1, 2007

Majestic America Line
Attn: Nico Corbijn, Senior VP of Marine Operations
2101 Fourth Ave, Suite 1150
Seattle, WA 98121

Dear Captain Corbijn,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the inadequacies of the Safety Management System (SMS) on Majestic America Line's EMPRESS OF THE NORTH (O.N. 1140867). During the vessel's 2007 operating season in Southeast Alaska, several casualties highlighted weaknesses in the SMS, drawing attention to the lack of detail in the SMS manual and also demonstrating the overall ineffectiveness of the system's implementation.

When the EMPRESS OF THE NORTH entered Southeast Alaska in May of this year, it did not hold a valid Safety Management Certificate. Within the first week of operations in the zone, the vessel ran aground, imperiling hundreds of lives and threatening pristine waterways just miles from the entrance of Glacier Bay National Park. This incident—the most significant marine casualty in Southeast Alaska this summer—could likely have been averted had an effective SMS been in place.

On July 14, 2007, the EMPRESS OF THE NORTH allided with the dock in Juneau during a routine mooring operation, causing minor damage to the vessel. The Master attributed the casualty to a strong current. However, other vessels dock at this same location under similar conditions hundreds of times per year without incident. One cannot rule out the possibility that a more robust SMS could have made a difference in this case.

The vessel's classification society, ABS, issued an interim Safety Management Certificate to the vessel on June 30, 2007 (to expire December 29, 2007), but this did not prevent a serious blackout from occurring less than a month later on July 27, 2007. The incident started when a fuel oil pump plug relief valve failed, allowing fuel to spray out from the #2 generator. No splash guards were in place to contain or divert the fuel, so the leaking fuel sprayed onto the #1 generator, posing a fire hazard. The failure of the #2 generator caused the other two on-line generators to overload and shut down. The emergency generator then failed to automatically start, as the engine air supply damper had not been reset following routine maintenance. As a result, the vessel was totally without power or propulsion for a minute and a half while underway in a situation that called for close maneuvering. Following this Reportable Marine Casualty, the Master failed to notify the Coast Guard within the required time limits.

The Coast Guard Marine Inspector who attended the vessel after the blackout discovered that members of the engine department did not reference the SMS manual at all during the casualty. When the inspector asked to look at the manual, some time elapsed before the crew could produce it. Reviewing the manual, the inspector found that it provided insufficient direction concerning the

proper response to a generator failure. The crew's lack of familiarity with the manual's location and contents reflects the general impotence of the whole system as it currently exists. Such a weak SMS does a disservice to the crew and risks the safety of everyone on board the vessel.

On August 30, 2007, the Coast Guard discovered that the Chief Engineer had no endorsement for Chief Engineer on his license (which was for 2nd Engineer Unlimited). Additionally, prior to your resuming operations in Southeast Alaska in July, it was discovered that your vessel did not have the requisite manning per your Certificate of Inspection to meet the federal pilotage requirements found in 46 CFR 15.812. The ISM Code states that "the Company should ensure that each ship is manned with qualified, certificated and medically fit seafarers in accordance with national and international requirements." That less-than-fully qualified officers were assigned to the vessel underscores the ineffectiveness of the SMS.

The Coast Guard would like to see a stronger, more detailed SMS implemented on the EMPRESS OF THE NORTH. Specifically, the management should address weaknesses in the following areas: instructions & procedures (ISM Code 1.4.2); communication lines (ISM Code 1.4.3); reporting accidents (ISM Code 1.4.4); response to emergency (ISM Code 1.4.5); seafarer qualifications (ISM Code 6.2); and procedures for new personnel (ISM Code 6.3). **Evidence of corrective actions must be provided to the Coast Guard (Sector Juneau) no later than November 1, 2007.** Should you fail to provide evidence of corrective actions by November 1, 2007, I will not allow your vessel to operate in Southeast Alaska during the 2008 season until corrective actions are provided. We will also forward your response/non-response to Sector Portland for their reference and further action at their discretion. Additionally, we have articulated our concerns to American Bureau of Shipping (ABS), the issuer of the EMPRESS OF THE NORTH SMS Certificate, who have subsequently requested a copy of this correspondence for their follow-up evaluations.

The EMPRESS OF THE NORTH's safety record in Southeast Alaska in the 2007 summer season is a point of serious concern. Sector Juneau will closely scrutinize the vessel upon its return in 2008, paying particular attention to the strength of the SMS. I expect to see marked improvement.

If you have any further questions regarding this matter, feel free to contact my Chief, Vessel Inspections Division, LT Randy Waddington, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

S. W. BORNEMANN
Commander, U. S. Coast Guard
Officer in Charge, Marine Inspection
Southeast Alaska

Copy: American Bureau of Shipping (ABS)
Sector Portland
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